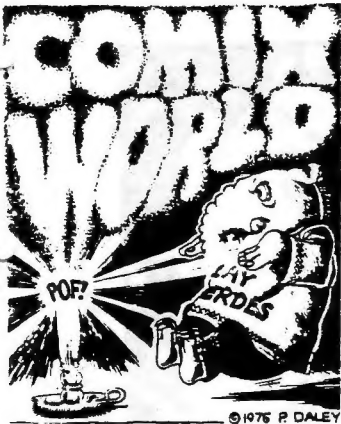




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For nearly a decade now, Harvey Pekar has been living an illustrated life in the pages of his homegrown comic book, *AMERICAN SPLENDOR*. Question is: is it a life worth illustrating? Well, sometimes, and in some parts, but not all the time and certainly not in all parts. The latest issue, the 9th, is always depressing, frequently a total bore, and only about 10% interesting (a story about two Jews who find out that the minor aspects of human existence do more to wreck a relationship than any major ideas held in common). Well, I've

praised Pekar's writing in past issues of *CW* and I still consider him a talent, but I think he's been in Cleveland way too long, that he's burned out there and ought to move on. I realize, of course, that this would involve giving up many things (perhaps some of those good ol' 78s), but a writer either moves on or he stagnates, repeats himself ad infinitum, and burns out. In some ways, Pekar has been to underground or regional comic books what Sherwood Anderson was to the early American short story; be a shame to see him fail to realize his potential.

-Clay Geerdes

The Olympic Games. Has to be one of the best hustles ever designed. Tons of money made, and you don't have to pay the performers a dime. If they get paid, they're not amateurs, right? Heh! Heh! Genius, the guy who worked that out. If you go through all of that physical torture and come out the winner, what does the culture have to offer you? A job selling cameras on t-v. I can see Woody Guthrie turning over in his grave after hearing *THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND* played by that giant collage of marching bands in the L. A. Coliseum. None of the people Woody wrote and sang for will be anywhere near that stadium, not at those rich people's prices. The Olympics, the Michael Jackson tour, the Democratic and Republican cons, all of the big shows belong to the superrich, not to the people who live and work in this country. A news announcer said tickets to the games were being scalped at \$1200. Feel left out? 84 men playing Gerschwin's *RHAPSODY IN BLUE* and

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what were those women doing out there standing around waving their arms? Sexism? And could we enjoy the performance of the piece? Not with that stupid clod introjecting his dumb remarks every few bars. T-v announcers, like radio, never seem to know when to shut up. Hey, you can hardly see the HOLLYWOOD sign for the smog. And those folks are going to be competing in that air soon. I notice they went to commercial during the national anthem; there's patriotism for you. The sponsors are brokerage firms, car companies, fast food chains. I haven't heard so much freeze-dried music since I used to go to Wesleyan football games when I was in high. These opening ceremonies are like the world's longest half-time show. What would it be like to be one of 96 trombonists anyway? I mean, would anyone know if you just faked it? Jeez, a whole field of jazzercise going on out there. Aerobic hip. I can smell the sweat from here.

6 FRIDAY, AUGUST 3, 1984 THE DAILY CALIFORNIAN

Darkness & Light

By S.E. BINGHAM

Jim Pinkoski had his day in court this week, a little over a month after he terrorized the local branch of the Bank of America. He was sentenced to three years probation and he faces the possibility of having to reimburse local merchants for losses they suffered when the Berkeley police closed off the corner of Telegraph and Durant.

The street was closed because Pinkoski had locked himself in the conference room of the B of A with a loaded .25 caliber Barretta revolver and refused to come out until he was granted a press conference.

He used the press conference to explain his plan to restructure the U.S. banking system which has, he says, become a game that is "too sick, too weird, and too all-powerfully terrible" to be left alone any longer.

He says the problem is that this country has thousands of banks and each bank takes a cut out of the money it processes. So if there were fewer banks the price of transferring money would be lower.

In the limiting case, which is the one he wants to see, there would be only one bank. This generic bank would thus contain all of the money in circulation — or, to use Pinkoski's terminology, all of the numbers on computer tape.

The example that Pinkoski uses to explain himself is this: Suppose you want to buy a house. Under present circumstances you must go to a bank, borrow money in the form of a mortgage and pay it to the seller of the house. The seller then turns around and deposits the money in his bank, which, things being what they are, is probably a different bank. So your bank has lent out money and another bank has borrowed money. Your bank then saddles you with a heavy repayment schedule and the other bank relends the money to someone else.

But, says Pinkoski, if there were only one bank, the seller of your house would have put the money right back where you got it from, and that single bank would not have to strong-arm you to get its money back.

And not only that, but because the "unibank" would always get its money back, it wouldn't be afraid to loan it out. Anybody, says Pinkoski, would be able to get money to build a home and the bank would never have to foreclose on anyone, unless the managers of the bank were to backslide into their old greedy habits.

In that case, Pinkoski says, we'd be free to throw them out. The managers of this bank would be elected officials.

Pinkoski makes his living as a fantasy cartoonist, so he's willing to admit that this is a utopian idea. Still, he says, nothing is impossible, and the only major difficulty he sees in implementing his program lies in convincing bankers to give up their livelihood. "But it's our money," he says, "and we can do what we want with it."

"He's full of crap," says Roger Crane from the economics department at

BRIGHT IDEAS



UC Berkeley. Canada, according to Crane, has only three or four banks (which, relative to the 18,000 in the United States, is the same as one bank) and their mortgage rates are as high as our own. The same is true of England.

So, Crane says, "If his theory is true it doesn't work in practice." It is always possible, Crane added, to legislate low interest rates (the way the Russians do) but since you still need some method of allocating resources this just amounts to renaming the problem.

In any case, Crane says, he hasn't found any reason to argue with the "old tradition of having more competition to hold down interest rates."

But what about Pinkoski's claim that a single bank would be more willing to lend and slower to foreclose? "Sure," Crane said, "it would be great for borrowers, you'd never have to pay it back. Why not borrow money for cocaine?"

Sounds utopian to me.

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Blues Singer Big Mama Thornton, 57

Los Angeles

Willie Mae (Big Mama) Thornton, whose gritty renditions of "Hound Dog" and "Ball and Chain" inspired Elvis Presley and Janis Joplin, is dead at 57, a mortuary official said yesterday.

Thornton was found Wednesday evening dead of a heart attack at the Los Angeles boarding house where she lived, said Clint Ball, vice president of the Conner-Johnson Mortuary.

"Her death was not a surprise," San Francisco Blues Festival producer Tom Mazzolini said in a telephone interview. "She's been very weak."

"She was a large, robust woman, and when she came to the blues festival in 1979, she had skinny legs, skinny arms, a protruding belly and she could barely walk," Mazzolini said.

But, he added, "once she got to the stage and sat down, she played with such a tenderness, with such feeling and sensitivity. You knew this was a woman who had been through so much and apparently was visibly not well but was singing her heart out."

Born Dec. 11, 1926, in Montgomery, Ala., Thornton was the daughter of a minister and a church singer.

From 1941 to 1948 she toured the south with Sammy Green's Hot Harlem Review, working as a singer, dancer and comedienne. She drew her nickname from her girth. Her musical inspirations were Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey and Memphis Minnie, three blues giants of the 1920s and 1930s.

Thornton settled in Houston in 1948 and made her first records in 1950 for Peacock Records. During the '50s she toured with Johnny Otis' Rhythm & Blues Caravan.

Associated Press



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San Francisco Chronicle

Singing the Blues at Big Mama's Funeral

BY CAROL MCGRAW
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Hollywood

"Honey, you got to live the blues to sing 'em."

They were stuffing \$10 bills and personal checks into the pockets of Johnnie Otis' black and white robe.

"Money to help bury Mama," as one elderly man said, as he patted the famous bandleader-turned-preacher on the shoulder. "It was a beautiful service."

Big Mama Thornton, one of the last of the traditional Southern blues singers, was laid to rest Tuesday as she lived — with pain, laughter, music and the help of her friends.

Big Mama, who wrote Janis Joplin's hit "Ball and Chain" and who recorded "Hound Dog" in 1963 — before Elvis Presley — died here last week. Services were held at Conner Johnson Mortuary and burial was at Inglewood Memorial Park Cemetery.



Big Mama Thornton: she believed in God and the blues

Like many blues singers before her, she had little money when she died, but left a wealth of music and memories.

And everyone at the simple but poignant funeral seemed to have an "I remember Mama" story about the feisty and powerful singer who drank whiskey from the bottle while she played a mean game of dominoes — and who had a throaty, gutsy style of singing that sent chills up the spines of her audiences.

Pallbearer Terry DeRouen, a guitarist who said that he got his start with the singer's help, stood in the back of the chapel and surveyed the crowd of 200.

"Mama believed in God and the blues. In that order," he said quietly, before joining the other musicians turned pallbearers — Jeremiah Wright, Eldridge Hall and O. B. Wright — for their entrance into the chapel.

Otis, who discovered Willie Mae Thornton in the 1940s in Houston, said that three years ago she asked him to speak at her funeral when she died.

"She told me to make it short and make 'em smile," Otis said. "So smile and rejoice."

He recounted a story about how Big Mama always liked to wear men's suits, Western hats and cowboy boots. However, he finally persuaded her to wear an evening gown for her performance at Harlem's famed Apollo Theater. "She came on stage, kicked up her legs

and there were those Texas boots,

In a more somber vein he said

"Mama always told me that the blues were more important than having money. She told me: 'Artists are artists and businessmen are businessmen. But the trouble is the artists' money stays in the businessmen's hands.'"

Mourners nodded their head in agreement. "Tell 'em, Otis," several called out. "That's the truth."

Big Mama's professional and personal life was a roller coaster. While she received acclaim within blues circles for the song "Hound Dog," it was Elvis Presley who made the song popular.

It always seemed to happen like that in her life, Otis said, noting she persevered in spite of the fact that she was often on the losing end — whether it was legal hassles involving her songs, or the cirrhosis that finally killed her.

Otis implored the mourner: "Don't waste your sorrow on Big Mama; she's free. Don't feel sorry for Big Mama. There's no more illness. No more pain. No more suffering in a society where the color of skin was more important than the quality of your talent. Thank God she's free in the arms of the Saviour."

Big Mama died broke. Chris Strachwitz said on his KPFA show that the Southern California Blues Society put up the bread for the funeral. If you'd like to contribute for a headstone for her, send checks to her sister Mattie Fields, c/o Betty Miller, 9000 Fairview Avenue, San Gabriel, California 91775. I have to confess to being a longtime fan of Big Mama. She's singing "Ball and Chain" on my headphones while I write this, a song most of you oldtimers associate with Janis Joplin and the Avalon Ballroom. I took the pictures above during one of Big Mama's last appearances (She played Ashkenaz in Berkeley in 1983). Can't find the photos I took at Fillmore back in 1968, but I remember that night well. I was near the side of the stage where the steps were and in those days you could still get right in close. When Big Mama finished up with "Hound Dog" she came down those steps in a golden evening gown, smiling and high from the energy of the crowd. It was a privilege to see her. Remember, it wasn't until the sixties and the ballroom scene in the Bay Area that black performers were widely seen by white audiences. The blacks influenced all the white stars (Jefferson Airplane was named for Blind Lemon Jefferson), but it was the white bands that got the bookings (lots of books on this, Gleason's JEFFERSON AIRPLANE, Marcus' MYSTERY TRAIN, Leroy Jones' BLUES PEOPLE). As sick as she was during that final show, Big Mama's voice was still as rich and beautiful as it was when she first sang in the choir as a girl. So long, Big Mama, no more ball or chain.

C. G. 9/84

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